NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
Monterey, California

INNOVATION IN ORGANIZATIONS: A DISCURSIVE PERSPECTIVE

by

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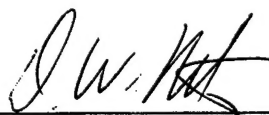
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ABSTRACT *(maximum 200 words)* Extant literature primarily treats communication as it relates to innovation as a linear, mechanistic process. This article reconceptualizes innovation as a process that occurs *within* communication. Using Fairclough's three dimensional view of discourse, I demonstrate the linkages of text, discourse, and social practice in an organization where distance learning evolves discursively and becomes embedded in the language system.

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Abstract

Extant literature primarily treats communication as it relates to innovation as a linear, mechanistic process. This article reconceptualizes innovation as a process that occurs *within* communication. Using Fairclough's three dimensional view of discourse, I demonstrate the linkages of text, discourse, and social practice in an organization where distance learning evolves discursively and becomes embedded in the language system.

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Introduction

In the current environment, organizations are encouraged to be flexible, adaptable, and innovative. As organizations struggle to "reinvent" themselves, become "learning organizations," and be "transformational," innovation allows firms to improve the quality of their products or services, revitalize their business activities or even enter new markets. "Innovation," itself, is not a novel topic: it has been studied by sociologists and anthropologists since the early 1900's. Further, researchers in communication, management and organization acknowledge the central role that communication plays in innovation. In general, however their work, has continued to view communication as a "conduit-type" (Axley, 1985) phenomenon that transfers information among organizational members. For instance, Rogers' (1962) early work on the diffusion of innovation, including a book, *Diffusion of Innovations*, that is still considered a central text on communication and innovation, used a linear model of communication where messages were transmitted from a source to a receiver. Rogers' later revised this view, realizing that it limited his view of diffusion. In his 1995 revision, he reconceptualized the role of communication in innovation, redefining communication as a process whereby participants create and share information with one another to reach mutual understanding. However, Rogers' new conceptualization of the role of communication in innovation still fails to take account of innovation as a process involving the creation of knowledge through dynamic processes involving a struggle over power and authority. A discourse theory perspective achieves this end.

Discursive views of organizations are an emerging area of interest in current business and managerial thinking. As Putnam and Fairhurst (2001, p. 78) put it, "discourse patterns fuse with organizational processes in ways that make language and organizations a unique domain."

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Consequently, an increasing number of management and communication scholars are writing about the central role of discourse in organizations (Phillips and Brown, 1995; Grant, Keenoy & Oswick, 1998; Livesey, 1999, 2001; Marshak, 1998; O'Connor, 1995; Putnam and Fairhurst, 2001). Such scholars posit a view of discourse that is central to the process of organizing where meaning is constructed, maintained, and contested among organizational members. They see discourse more than simply a means of communicating, reporting, or manipulating information but rather as a means of socially constructing reality (Grant, Keenoy, & Oswick, 1998).

Extending this work to the study of innovation, this paper conceptualizes innovation from a discursive perspective and provides an example to illustrate this approach. Thus, I provide a framework for thinking about the role that language plays in the innovation process in organizations and look at the ways in which language might be considered as core to the innovation process. The argument presented is intended to provoke ideas and dialog regarding discourse in organizations. Thus, it is speculative and exploratory rather than data-driven and definitive.

This paper includes a review of the relevant literature on innovation and communication and a view of innovation as a discursive process that explores the power dynamics embedded in discursive processes. Then, it demonstrates the applicability of the concepts, using an example of how distance learning technologies came into being at a university. The conclusion of the paper offers implications and suggestions for further research.

Literature on the Diffusion of Innovation in Organizations

To date, most of the literature has treated innovation as an orderly, linear, and stage-like process. Communication, while seen as central, is generally subordinated or simply treated as a tool to diffuse innovation.

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Innovation Defined

Innovation has been described as the process of developing and implementing new ideas that are new to an individual or an organizational unit (Damanpour, 1991, Dougherty, 1996, Van de Ven, et al. 1999, Rogers, 1995). The new idea may be technical, which includes a technical innovation such as a product or service, or an administrative innovation, which includes procedures, policies, or new organizational forms (Van de Ven, et al., 1999). In fact, most innovations involve both technical and administrative aspects (Leavitt, Dill, and Eyring, 1965). Innovations have come to be seen as positive. Indeed, innovations that are not successful are often referred to as "mistakes." (Van de Ven, et al. 1999.)

Innovations, usually entail a recombination of old ideas, a challenge to existing methods, or a concept that is simply novel to the individuals involved (Zaltman, et al., 1973). This *perception* of newness differentiates innovation from change since all innovations that are implemented imply change, but not all change involves innovation (Zaltman, et al., 1973).

Early Research on Innovation

Research on innovation began in the early 1900s when sociologists and anthropologists started investigating the social impact of new technological, agricultural and medical ideas throughout the world. (For a thorough discussion of the early history of innovation research see Rogers, 1995.) In the 1960's scholars began studying innovation in organizations, shifting the focus from the adoption of innovations by *individuals* to the diffusion of innovation within an *organization* (Rogers, 1995). With the introduction of computer-related technologies of the 80's and 90's, innovation research experienced a renewed interest by scholars and practitioners alike.

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Current Views on the Diffusion of Innovation in Organizations

For the most part, innovation in organizations has been conceived of as a linear, stage-like process (Slappendel, 1996). While communication is seen as critical to the innovation process, it has generally been subordinated. In the literature where communication is the focus, it, too, has predominately been treated in linear, mechanistic, and "conduit-like" terms where communication is viewed as a tool to diffuse innovation throughout the organization.

For example, in the most frequently cited work on communication and the diffusions of innovation, Rogers (1995) devotes much of his discussion to communication. His five stages of the innovation-decision process—knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation—focus on the use of different communication channels. His talk about diffusion exemplifies a "conduit-like" notion of communication:

"...communication is the process by which participants create and share information with one another in order to reach a mutual understanding. Diffusion is a particular type of communication in which the message content that is exchanged is concerned with a new idea. The essence of the diffusion process is the information exchange through which one individual communicates a new idea to one or several others." (pg. 17-18)

Rogers is not alone in this "conduit-like" approach. In a recently published book titled, "*Innovation: The Communication of Change in Ideas, Practices and Products*, communication expert, William Spence (1994), uses the SMCRE (source, message, channel, receiver, and effect) model of communication based on Lasswell's 1948 model of human communication.

Likewise, a similar linear approach found in the communications literature is a networked-based model for innovation diffusion. This notion, popularized by such scholars as Granovetter (1982) and Monge and Eisenberg (1987), focuses on "patterns of contact between communication partners that are created by transmitting and exchanging messages through time and space" (Monge and Contractor, 2001, pg. 440). Examples of this approach are seen in

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recent studies of innovation by Johnson and Chang (2000) who looked at the interrelationships between internal and external innovation-related communication, Meyer (2000) who studied individuals' proactive roles in the development and implementation of innovations, and Steward and Conway (1998) who used network mapping and document analysis to compare innovations in UK and German-based firms.

Using a somewhat varied approach, Ulijn et al. (2000) employed a psycholinguistics to study the dissemination of scientific and technical innovations across linguistic borders. In short, each of these studies tends to view communication as a tool to diffuse organizational innovation.

Knowledge Management

In an overlapping literature, knowledge management often refers to innovation in organizations. While, knowledge, itself, is an age-old concept dating back to the days of Plato and Socrates, what is new is capturing knowledge gained by individuals and spreading it to others in the organization (Takeushi, 2001). According to Takeushi (2001), the US, unlike the Europeans or Japanese, have primarily used an IT-driven perspective to knowledge management which has limited their thinking about knowledge and innovation. This view, which tends to reify and objectify knowledge, ignoring the human dimension of knowledge creation where multiple and contradictory views are critical in an environment of radical and discontinuous change (Malhotra, 2000). Inasmuch, this view of knowledge management looks much like the extant literature in innovation: communication is seen as central, yet it is similarly treated as a conduit to package, store, and move knowledge in a systematic, mechanical manner (see Special Issue of California Management Review, Spring 1988).

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A Generative Perspective

In this article, I offer an alternative view which may offer a generative look at innovation and knowledge management. This view, grounded in discourse analysis (e.g. Fairclough, 1995; Potter and Weatherell, 1992; Stillar, 1998) and social theory, (e.g. Derrida, 1978; Gadamer, 1979; Gergen, 1991; Giddens, 1984; Foucault, 1979; Wittgenstein, 1968) portrays a discursive view of the innovation process. This perspective would suggest that rather then viewing communication as a tool for diffusing innovation throughout an organization that innovation is a phenomena that occurs *within* communication.

While this discursive view is a neglected perspective in the literature on innovation and communication, it has begun to be explored in a related literature on organizational change (Barrett, Thomas, and Hocevar 1995; Czarniawska and Sevon, 1996; Ford and Ford, 1995; O'Connor, 1995, 2000). This literature, like this article, posits a discursive-based view of organizations.

A Discursive View of Innovation

The extant literature on innovation in organizations has primarily been prescriptive offering managers' best practices of successful innovation. Research methodologies have tended to treat organizations as containers delineating organizational variables (including communication), their relationships, and contributions to effectiveness. Typical research questions that have characterized the communications-related literature include: Does environmental scanning and extra-organizational communication enhance innovation? How does internal communication create an internal environment favorable to the survival of a new idea? Do hierarchical levels in an organization inhibit the flow of innovation ideas? What role do boundary spanners play in the diffusion of ideas between and within an organization?

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The alternate view posed in this article comes from a different set of assumptions where discourse is seen as central rather than peripheral to organizing. Instead of reifying the organization, the focus is on everyday, moment-by-moment discursive practices that make up what is commonly termed organizational "action" (Marshak, 1998; Woodilla 1998). This view of language assumes that texts do not reflect or mirror objects, events or categories, but that they actively construct these things. Consequently, language is seen as having social and political implications and meanings. The perspective taken in this article, assumes that innovations are a social accomplishment, not an act of a single individual. This accomplishment constitutes and is constituted by communication, producing and reproducing social structures and actions (Giddens, 1984). This view contrasts with the positivist view of communication and organizations and instead treats communication and organizations as isomorphic. A view that posits organizations *as* texts. Taylor and Van Every (2000) talk about it as the "site" and "surface" of the emergence of organization in communication:

Communication is not about a social world; it is literally, the constituting of a social world. The reality lies not behind communication, or through it, but in it. 'Socialization of new members,' 'supervisor-subordinate relations,' 'organizational climate,' or 'organization' come into existence at precisely the moment we name them and begin to treat them as things in our world by naming it....

Thus, *the production of innovation is seen here as a discursive accomplishment*, occurring *within* and driven *by* communication rather than the reverse (Ford and Ford, 1995).

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Existing Social Practices – The Stable Language System

Innovation is a paradoxical combination of stability and change. On the one hand, organizations and organizing demand a certain level of coherence, predictability and stability for people to co-ordinate their day-to-day actions. On the other hand, innovation demands ambiguity, unpredictability and instability to introduce novelty into the system (Noteboom, 2000).

The discursive perspective of innovation posits that social practices in organizations are constituted from patterns of ongoing discourse that habituate over time. These patterns create a background of commonality, or sense of stability, that allow organizational members to coordinate their activity. Over time, words develop meaning in relation to other words that allow organizations to achieve a sort of equilibrium. Through ongoing patterns of interaction, rules evolve that govern appropriate gestures and utterances in local circumstances (Barrett, Thomas, and Hocevar, 1993). For instance, organizational members are able to learn acceptable conventions for participating in department meetings, speaking to superiors, writing reports, or giving an executive briefing.

While language achieves a certain level of stability, words are never fully determined (Derrida, 1978). In an ongoing, dynamic process, organizational members constantly "try on" meanings of words noticing how they reinforce or contradict existing notions.

Introducing Novel Language

According to Fairclough (1992), the origins and motivation of innovation result from the problematization of existing social practices. In response to "dilemmas" (Billig, et al., 1988), individuals then go about creating innovative discourse. This innovative discourse calls on new combinations of words, sentences, texts and meanings to introduce novelty into the language

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system. These words, however, must be interpreted within the pre-existing system of language in order to have meaning (Gergen, 1991).

As an example, take the "novel" concept of "self-managed teams" that has been introduced in many organizations throughout the country. An individual hearing those words must conjure up a network of meanings and relatedness. In order to understand the words "self-managed teams," other terms and relationships must also be understand. The concept "self-managed team" is a discursive accomplishment that links other terms such as "organization," "co-workers," and "managers." The phrase "self-managed teams" conjures up notions of power, or lack of it. It establishes one's relation to others in an established, ongoing system of relatedness. Understanding the words depends on understanding the difference between this term and other terms in the language system. "Taking on" new words allows individuals to develop novel applications that in turn alter their basic assumptions about the nature of work. Hence, language enables new action alternatives but is also constrained by previous patterns, actions and assumptions.

"Catching On" -- Making Sense and Moving the Innovation Forward

How does an innovation or novel language get embedded in discourse patterns? In other words, how would an "innovation" be recognized and become a part of the ongoing practice?

An innovation "catches on" when discourse cumulatively begins to produce structural changes in the discourse practices within the institution (Fairclough, 1992). Through a layering of multiple texts and discourses, individuals begin to make sense of the innovation and the innovation begins to take shape. In this process, the existing "stable" discourse is disarticulated and new discourses are rearticulated creating new discursive patterns. (Fairclough, 1992).

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Embedding Discourse Patterns

When an innovation begins to "catch on," new discourse patterns become embedded in the language system. To further explain this notion, I will draw on Fairclough's (1992) multidimensional view of discourse. This framework suggests that "any discursive event (i.e. any instance of discourse) is seen as being simultaneously a piece of text, an instance of discursive practice and an instance of social practice" (1992: 4). Accordingly, the text dimension pertains to the particular text (spoken language or written documents), the discursive practice dimension addresses the processes of textual production, distribution and interpretation and the social practice dimension relates to the institutional and organizational circumstances of the discursive event and how they shape the discourse(s). So a particular piece of text can be viewed as having links from the past and project a future in time, connected "intertextually" to multi-levels of text, discursive practice and social practice simultanously.

"Intertextuality," a term coined by Kristeva (1986), can be either horizontal or vertical. Horizontal intertextual relations refers to the way that texts relate to those which proceed and those which follow it in a chain of texts. An example might be how an email is related intertextually to earlier and subsequent emails. Vertical intertextual relations refer to text and other texts which constitute its context.

According to Kristeva, this intertextuality is "the insertion of history (society) into a text and of this text into history (1986, 39). In this way, Fairclough (1992) explains, text responds to, reaccentuates, and reworks past texts, and in doing so helps to make history and contribute to the process of change.

For example, consider a committee meeting. Interactions in the meeting are shaped by prior "texts" including such communications as conversations with others, emails, agendas, and

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memos. Each utterance not only is linked to the past but also is shaped by what individuals anticipate as subsequent texts that will result from the meeting.

Out of a system of texts (including the way they are produced, distributed and interpreted) discourses evolve, bringing ideas into being. For example, a discourse of continuous change has increasingly become associated with effective management (Beer, 2000; Kanter, 2001; Kotter, 1996). This discourse has become so powerful that managers can rely on this rhetoric to push through proposals. In fact, the discourse has become so normalized that opponents or dissenters are often referred to as "resistors," "dinosaurs," "old guard," or "out of touch" (Zorn, et al., 2000).

Over time these discourses evolve forming interlocking webs that create both stability and contradictions, allowing the discourses to transform social practices. Referring back to the self-managed team example, a discourse of self-managed teams might rely on a discourse of change which in turn may be supported or resisted by the ongoing discourse of resource management in the organization, and so on.

Power and Contestation

Discourse patterns are not ideologically neutral (Barrett, Thomas, Hocevar, 1995), rather they reproduce and transform power relations and therefore can be viewed as political processes (Fairclough, 1992; Parker, 1992). Unlike traditional views of power based on formal authority or resource based power (French and Raven, 1968; Pettigrew, 1973; Pfeffer, 1981), the discourse perspective posits power as embedded in networks of discourse relations (Phillips and Hardy, 1997).

Power, therefore, is exercised by modifying discourses that underlie important concepts. The act of creating and disseminating texts is therefore a political act and underlies a struggle for

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power and control.

Returning to the example of self-managed teams. As this concept is linguistically shaped and practiced, a discursive struggle invariably ensues between managers and workers. What does it mean to be "self-managed?" Who will make decisions about workload and rewards? What are the managers' responsibilities in a self-managed organization? As workers and managers constitute and reconstitute the meaning of "self-managed" teams, taken-for-granted assertions about work, managers, and the workers are all laid open for revision.

The Innovation Takes Shape

An innovation is "talked into being" through fine, yet layered strips of interaction—a "laminating" effect, according to Boden (1994). Layers upon layers of meetings, informal conversations, memos, reports, emails, mailroom talk, web sites, shape the innovation in a particular way at each local site. Boden provides a vivid description of this laminating effect that constitutes "the mutual and simultaneous elaboration of structure and action across time and space":

> People in organizations talk everywhere, in large formal meetings planned weeks and months in advance or in emergency sessions of one kind or another. They talk in small informal meetings, crammed into one another's office, or at staff meetings and production meetings in large windowless centers or in the back of noisy taxis. They talk on the phone—constantly, or so it would seem. They hang out in doorways, hovering on the boundaries of each other's territories, exchanging not just pleasantries and football scores but urgent news and stale stories, new jokes and hot gossip....They talk not so much up and down the hierarchy in the strict steps suggested by organizational charts, but all over the place—up, down and most creatively laterally—weaving news and information, sniffing for smoke, watching for trends, catching the quickness or monotony of the moment. (Boden, 1994, p. 76)

So the innovation of self-managed teams are talked into being and worked out moment-to-moment in a system of relatedness. Along the way, meanings are contested and power is

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negotiated. As the practice becomes embedded, new discourse patterns begin to characterize the organization, establishing a new order of stable, yet fragile, discourse within the organization.

Illustration

An illustration is provided to elucidate the conceptual ideas provided in this article. The example is not meant to represent a data-driven case analysis rather it is intended to demonstrate how these concepts might work in practice.

The organization used for this example is a graduate school of management for the Department of Defense in the United States employing about 60 full-time faculty. The university, in which the school is housed, began its operations in 1909. Today the university's student population is about 1,800, providing graduate degree programs in a variety of programs including engineering, physical sciences, space science, and management.

The university has a unique administrative structure. The head of the university is an admiral in the US Navy and called the "superintendent." He is responsible to the larger military organization seeing that the university's mission is accomplished within budget constraints. Most of his days are spent dealing with external constituents. The superintendent's principal assistant is the Provost who is responsible for all academic matters of the university. The provost is a civilian, tenured professor.

The university maintains a dual bureaucracy. One, the military hierarchy which includes several administrative positions as well as the students, and the other, a university-style hierarchy that includes a majority of the faculty and other administrative positions. Faculty look much like those in other US universities who hold tenure and are responsible for teaching as well as publication of research. One difference in this institution and other post-graduate institutions,

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is its strong focus on defense-related "relevancy" and its close links to defense "sponsors." Because of this "customer" focus, the institution is often referred to as a "corporate university."

Until seven years ago, the majority of the education provided by the university was to resident students in full-time programs. Around 1994, experiments with distance learning began via video teleconferencing as an innovative means of delivering education to non-resident students. Distance learning had many starts and stops in its early stages, however, recently there has been a decided shift to offering more programs to off-site students. Most of the off-site programs are offered via video-teleconference using a two-way video/audio system. This expansion has created a relatively small but growing population of part-time students.

The distance learning offerings have increased such that the university now has six video-teleconferencing studios that are in use most of the time. Numerous faculty have been involved in teaching the distance learning courses. This shift is the focus of this article. How did discourse patterns evolve to influence the social interactions at the Defense University?

Innovation Comes to the Management School

To demonstrate the micro/macro elements of this discursive perspective, this article focuses on the innovation of distance learning within a school of management (SOM).

The data used to illustrate these concepts include conversations, web-sites and various documents dating from October 1993 to April 2001. Following techniques prescribed by Fairclough (1992), discourse samples were chosen to represent cruces or moments of crises to highlight the evolution of the innovative practice.

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[1] Pseudo names are used to describe the organization and individuals within the organization.

Existing Social Practices in the School of Management - The Stable Language System

I will begin by turning the clock back to 1993 when resident graduate education was the dominate mode in SOM. At that time, students came to the SOM for 18-21 months, carried a full load of courses, and left the university with a Masters degree in management. Faculty generally taught in classrooms that were located near their offices. They met with 10-30 students face-to-face for 50 or 100-minute classes per week over an academic quarter.

If one were to look for traces of the term "distance learning" within the department, it would be difficult to find references to it. The 1993 university catalog is silent about distance learning. The school's 1993 course scheduling matrix shows no traces of distance learning. In fact, at this time, I would argue that most members of the school would not have seen "distance learning" as a possibility within the scope of the its activities.

Outside the university, however, conversations about distance learning proliferated. Advances in technology, as well as demands from the business community, in particular, set the stage for a discourse about distance learning that were becoming visible in conversations with faculty outside the university and in numerous books and articles (e.g. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*).

Novel Language Comes to the School of Management

During the 1994 academic year, two students within the department chose to write their masters thesis on the feasibility of offering masters courses to students at a distant site. One of the students saw this not only as an academic exercise but also as a practical one. He viewed distance learning as a solution to a problem. The problem: Officers wanted or were required to have masters degrees but were in constrained career paths that made 18-month on-campus graduate study infeasible. Out of conversations with one of the student's future commander

officer and incorporating a multitude of texts including conversations with advisors, technology specialists, and the existing literature, the two students fashioned the beginnings of a discourse that made distance learning at SOM seem possible.

In meetings with the Dean of the SOM, the students extended the language beyond the thesis document, attempting to move beyond the rhetoric of the thesis and breathe life into distance learning. In the end, three masters level courses were offered to a distant site. The project was labeled a "pilot project" which signaled an experiment--something new, something innovative, even room for failure. Three faculty were hand-picked who might increase the likelihood of a success. Within a three-month period, the pace of conversations, memos and emails around the project accelerated as the innovation began to come to life.

As the faculty began to prepare for the distance learning courses, they were forced to talk about teaching and learning in new ways. One prerequisite was to learn at least a minimal amount of technical jargon to interface with the audio-visual equipment. Faculty became familiar with "document cameras," "electronic whiteboards," and "dial-up networks." If the "system went down," it might mean that class was cancelled for the day and alternative ways of "delivery" would have to be devised. Faculty began to realize that they could not simply mirror teaching habits from the traditional classroom. Learning was becoming "technologized" forcing the faculty to rethink interactions with the students. Face-to-face case discussions, a typical genre in management classrooms, had to be restructured to incorporate the constraints of the audio-visual classrooms. Office hours would now be held via email instead of face-to-face. Each element of the taken-for-granted aspect of teaching was now open for revision.

Faculty who taught the pilot courses had mixed reactions. Some days the experience seemed positive, other days it was full of frustrations. In the end, though, the project was labeled

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a "success." Announcements at faculty meetings, briefings to potential sponsors, conversations with upper management espoused the successful experiment The project now became an official school "initiative." The school was capable of teaching courses at a distance so why not a degree program? This experience was to lay the foundation for the concept of "distance learning" within the school.

Catching On – Making Sense and Moving the Discourse Forward

An innovation "catches on" as discourse cumulatively begins to produce change in practices within the institution. Different factions within and outside the institution begin to increasingly engage in conversations about the innovation –sometimes in support and sometimes in opposition.

Distance learning, in concept, was supported by the administration at Defense University. It was seen as forward looking and "customer focused." Nevertheless, in 1994, when the Dean of SOM approached the superintendent about resources to fund the innovative pilot program, he was told that funds would not be available. While the university would provide support in the way of audio-visual equipment and technicians, the distance programs would need to be self-supporting.

These conversations linked the discourse of resources to the discourse of distance learning. It eventually spawned a new vocabulary of "investment capital" needed for "self-supporting" programs and a need for "costing the programs" in order to "charge" a customer. Language that heretofore had not been a part of the system.

Meanwhile the director of one of the management curricula was experiencing a drop in enrollment. In conversations with a potential sponsor, he hears a familiar problem—employees at his site need management degrees but are not able to attend campus for full-time study.

Distance learning appears to be a solution to the dilemma. Building on the school's experiments, he fashions a curricula to meet the sponsors needs. The design would require a critical mass of faculty involvement thus the conversations must now extend throughout SOM and will now require faculty approval to proceed. These conversations now spawn review committees complete with meetings, emails, memos and reports. A cacophony of voices is now become audible in this evolving discourse of distance learning.

A Message From the Incoming Admiral

To illustrate Fairclough's three dimensional view of discourse, I will use a specific document that was produced by an incoming superintendent in 1998. An analysis of this document demonstrates the duality of stability and contradictions embedded in organizational texts. To place the document in context, this admiral was the second superintendent during the timeframe of this analysis. He was an alumnus of the Defense University who majored in computer science, with a strong bias for information technology. An admirals' tenure at a particular command is about three years. Like any corporate executive, it is imperative for admirals to demonstrate their leadership capabilities to insure their promotability. Incoming admirals generally begin their tenure by announcing how they will "make their mark" on the organization. This admiral was no exception.

Prior to his coming to the Defense University, the incoming admiral sent an email to the faculty. The document was titled the "Admiral's Vision." The purpose of the document appeared to be his view of the precarious situation of the University and his remedy for the problem. Central to his vision was a focus on distance learning.

The document resembled a letter with a large Defense University logo at the top of the page. The logo included a large military symbol with the words "United States Military" across

the top and "The Defense University" across the bottom—a reminder of the dual nature of the university (both military and academic). This duality, in itself, portrays one of the many contradictions in this organization. On one hand, the military's culture stresses teamwork, compliance, and strong leadership. On the other hand, the academic culture values autonomy, independence and a hands-off leadership style. This duality is ever present in the functioning of day-to-day activities in the university and frequently a source of tension.

The first sentence in the document begins with an announcement to the faculty, "I have been selected to be the next Superintendent of our Defense University. I know we have an Executive Panel developing a vision for the University, however until it is out, I am gathering my thoughts to define my vision to move the Defense University to the next millennium." By sending the letter out before his arrival and by signaling the construction of his own vision for the university, the admiral establishes a proactive stance. While acknowledging the role of the Executive Panel, it is clear that he will have his own vision to move the university "to the next millennium," setting the stage for monumental change during his tenure.

Although the first sentence seems to portray the author as a "take charge" person, the second sentence almost reverses his posture, "I want to solicit your leadership thoughts regarding our institution of high learning." Here the admiral appears to be soliciting faculty input—a sincere or only courteous gesture depending on the reader's interpretation. Through these words, it appears that the admiral is attempting to establish a relationship with the faculty, however the relationship remains ambiguous. The faculty, as interpreters of the document, bring varying experiences to their reading of the document. As they attempt to "read between the lines," they try to catch a glimpse of their future leader. What are his expectations? How will he attempt to alter the institution? Will he be heavy handed? Will faculty voices be heard and acted

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upon? Will he be an ally or will he simply "be in the way?"

The third through seventh sentences lay out a message of fear and sets the stage for a needed change. He talks about the larger military machine and its "lack of consensus regarding the necessity of the university." He talks about the military's increased "outsourcing" activities and the availability of other "quality graduate schools" that could meet the military's educational needs. He further goes on to talk about the military's "downsizing" and of the university's not being "responsive enough to meet the military's needs."

The remainder of the document then goes on to lay out the superintendent's proposal for reorganizing the university to improve its position. He begins by evoking an emphatic rhetoric of customer satisfaction, "We must work to better satisfy the military's future needs." And, then continues with a focus on distance education, "We must exploit Information Technology for the 21st Century. We will develop further education on the Internet."

The admiral's rhetoric is provocative—he challenges the value of the university, he calls into question the faculty's role in setting the future direction of the university, and he is pushing a strong customer orientation for the university's curricula. It is clear that the admiral intends to push the distance learning agenda forward. In fact, at a spiraling, seemingly incomprehensible pace if he expects large-scale asynchronous delivery of courses or curricula during his leadership.

Clearly this document is not autonomous. Temporally, the document represents textual chains of previous conversations with the university's administration and leaders in the larger military organization. His history as a computer science major are also evident in the text. Not only does the document pull from the past, but it also projects into the future. No doubt the "Admiral's Vision" will be transformed into numerous texts including informal conversations,

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formal briefings, announcements, and so on.

In the text, the admiral evokes multiple discourses. The discourse of change is evident in his "change or die" theme. This discourse overlays an evolving discourse of the technologization of education. The customer focus foreshadows a marketing discourse that will become a part of the university as they transform from a demand- driven educational system to a university that will learn to "sell" their products and services like other educational institutions.

Discursive Struggles and Texts as Political Sites

The discourse of education and learning at The Defense University and in the School of Management is in the process of being reconstituted. What was a relatively stable language system about education and learning is now fraught with ambiguity, unpredictability and instability, becoming a site of numerous discursive struggles.

The discourse of change is a site of contestation as individuals become allies or resistors of change. The discourse around student/teacher relations is another site of contestation. How will the new technology alter the role of the professor in the classroom? Will technology degrade or enhance the quality of interaction between teacher and student? Will the perceived demands of the new technology interrupt other core professional activities such as publishing?

Texts also become political sites as authors frame their positions vis-a-vis distance learning. The production, distribution, and interpretation of texts contribute to the reproduction and transformation of power relations within the organization.

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Reconstituting Learning and Education in the School of Management

Distance learning is talked into being—moment by moment, word by word, text by text. The innovation is fashioned in hallway talks as faculty share their success and horror stories, in committee meetings where faculty argue over the quality of technology-driven learning, in conversations with potential sponsors of distance programs, in resource discussions among the administrators, in resource discussions where faculty wrestle with new workload heuristics for distance teaching, in the teaching of each course as the pedagogy and technology evolves, and in debates over ownership of newly developed electronic course material.

Learning and education are in the process of reconstitution in the School of Management with language at the center of the process.

Summary and Implications

In this article, I have explored a discursive view of innovation. This view not only foregrounds communication, but it sees innovation as a process that occurs *within* communication. From this perspective, communication is seen not simply as a variable, but as core to understanding the innovation process. Using Fairclough's three dimensional view of discourse, I demonstrate critical linkages among texts, discourse and social practice, allowing me to explore innovation as a historical and contextual process.

Increasingly, scholars are concluding that little is known about the generative process by which innovation develops. Perhaps a discursive view provides new insights into this complex, nonlinear and uncertain process.

I hope that my discussion on the role of communication in business and management encourages reflection on assumptions we make about communication, organizations, and their relationship to one another. Emerging literature in the business communications literature

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(Jameson, 2000; Livesey, 1999, 2001) offers new perspectives of communication incorporating

such ideas as narrative theory and critical theory. Such work promises to expand our thinking.

This expanded view of business communication opens avenues for scholars with expertise in

such areas as narrative theory, enthnomethodology, rhetoric, socio-linguistics, social theory,

linguistics, and organizational theory to collaboratively explore more complex notions of

communication in the workplace.

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